Be the Best of Whatever You Are

Douglas Malloch

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IF you can't be the highway,
then just be a trail,
If you can't be the sun, be a star;
For it isn't by size that you win
or you fail —
Be the best of whatever you are!

Douglas Malloch

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BE THE BEST
OF WHATEVER YOU ARE

by

DOUGLAS MALLOCH

Author of "LITTLE HOP-SKIPPER,"
"TOTE-ROAD AND TRAIL,"
"COME ON HOME,"
ETC.

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DEDICATED WITH AFFECTION
TO
MY SON DONALD

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Be the Best of Whatever You Are

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill
Be a scrub in the valley—but be
The best little scrub by the side of the rill,
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.
If you can't be a bush be a bit of the grass,
Doing something for somebody's sake.
If you can't be a muskie then just be a bass,
But the liveliest bass in the lake.

We can't all be captains, some have to be crew,
There's something for all of us here,
There's big work and little for people to do,
And the task we must do is the near.
If you can't be the highway then just be a trail,
If you can't be the sun be a star,
For it isn't by size that you win or you fail—
Be the best of whatever you are!

All Together

I'm sure a band must like to play.
I don't mean men who blow the things
Or pound the drum. I mean the way
The slide trombone just sings and sings,
And then the proud cornet, tut-tut,
Joins in, and all the others—but
I'm sure it makes some difference whether
They are all playing all together.

If each should try so loud to play
That no one else was ever heard,
The drum to roar, the brass to bray—
Well, wouldn't that be quite absurd?
Though that would make a lot of noise,
That isn't what the world enjoys—
It makes a lot of difference whether
They all are playing all together.

And in an office, in a mill,
A bank, a factory, a store,
What makes it music, always will,
Is not the wage you're working for,
Is not your title nor your size,
But folks who try to harmonize!
For toil just seems to slip its tether
When all are working all together.

Bill Brown

Bill Brown made a million, Bill Brown, think of that,
A boy, you remember, as poor as a rat,
Who hoed for the neighbors, did jobs by the day;
Well, Bill's made a million, or near it, they say.
You can't understand it? Well, neither could I,
And then I remembered, and now I know why:
The bell might be ringin', the dinner-horn blow,
But Bill always hoed to the end of the row.

Bill worked for my father, you maybe recall;
He wasn't a wonder, not that, not at all;
He couldn't out-hoe me, or cover more ground,
Or hoe any cleaner, or beat me around;
In fact I was better one way that I knew—
Gettin' back to the house when the dinner-horn blew.
One toot from the kitchen and home I would go;
But Bill always hoed to the end of the row.

We used to get hungry out there in the corn.
You talk about music, what equals a horn,
A horn yellin' dinner, tomatoes and beans,
And pork and potatoes and gravy and greens?
I ain't blamin' no one for quittin' on time;
To stop with the whistle, that ain't any crime.
But, as for that million—well, this much I know:
That Bill always hoed to the end of the row.

Butter Fingers

When we played at one old cat,
Or chose up sides, and things like that,
There were days we dropped the ball,
Couldn't make an out at all.
Don't know why, we couldn't tell,
But how all the kids would yell,
"Butter fingers."

Other days we captured flies,
Tagged out runners twice our size,
Caught the pitcher's outs and drops,
Made those great one-handed stops,
Didn't seem to miss a thing,
Never heard a critic sing,
"Butter fingers."

But, I might as well confess,
We didn't know and couldn't guess,
Never really understood,
Why our game was bad or good—
Why we played our best today,
Yet tomorrow heard them say,
"Butter fingers."

That's the reason, in the game
Men call life, I'm slow to blame

Those who fumble this or that,
Be it life or one old cat.
Just remember, when they fall,
Days that you yourself were all
"Butter fingers."

The Difference in Men

This is the difference that I
Have found in men: Though many turn,
Forsake the journey when they learn
The road is rough, the hill is high,
There always are a few who try.

This is the difference I find:
There always are a few who press
Onward and upward to success,
When other fellows fall behind
Because the weather grows unkind.

This is the difference: To do,
To dare, to win, brave hearts require.
Oh, I have watched a thousand tire
For one that saw the journey through—
And yet there always are a few.

Capital and Labor

I've heard a lot of theories,
The rights of "capital", and "labor's";
But why two names for such as these,
When one would do, and that one "neighbors"?
I wouldn't work for any man
Who wasn't that, or wouldn't hire him.
If someone talked of class or clan,
I'd either quit him, or I'd fire him.

There are a lot of honest men
Employing men—why work for others?
And, if I labored for one, then
I'd think of him and me as brothers.
There are a lot of right good lads;
Be right yourself and you will find them,
As fine young fellows as their dads;
I'd hire them and I'd stand behind them.

And then we'd work together, try
To make our work, our product, vital.
It wouldn't matter much if I
Or he should wear the bigger title.
I'd work for him or he for me—
The only thing that mattered whether
We had the common sense to see
We two are working here together.

Dry Your Eyes

This morning in the barber's chair
I learned a lesson, found a truth
I had not thought of in my youth.
You would not think to find it there,
And yet I saw, and so may you,
A lesson in a plain shampoo.

The truth was this: Though barbers try
To dry your face when they are done,
You'll find you are the only one
To get the soap-suds from your eye.
The barber is a clever elf,
But you must dry your eyes yourself.

You'll have some sorrow now and then,
A disappointment, or a grief,
To try your strength, to test belief,
And many women, many men,
Will come with words of sympathy—
And that is splendid, I agree.

And yet, when bowed beside your dead,
When crushed with disappointment, you,
And no one else, can pull you through—
You are the one to lift your head,
Put grief behind you, seek the dawn,
And dry your eyes, and stumble on.

Climbing

I saw a hill, and on it men,
  And some were high, and some were higher,
And some were even higher then;
  So always do a few aspire.
Halfway were some content to rest,
But some had onward, upward, pressed,
And one had found the eagle's nest,
  Had fought the bird, and overcome it,
  And fixed his banner on the summit.

I shouted, "Brother, how so high?"
  Then shouted back the unafraid one,
"By road and trail, and bye and bye,
  A trail no more, I went and made one!"
No fairy let him down a stair;
He was not legislated there;
He had his losses, had his care;
  If wrong his judgment, poor his guess,
  He climbed on failures to success.

I saw a hill, that hill was life,
  And in the valley heard complaining;
Some called it sorrow, called it strife,
  Its inequality maintaining.
And yet it seemed like any hill;
A few were climbing with a will,

Each moment climbing higher still—
For fame or fortune, wealth or riming,
The only way to climb is climbing!

Habits

I saw a stream among the hills,
Where any man might step across;
I saw it where the vale it fills,
Where angry billows leap and toss;
And then I whispered, "I suppose
That so it is a habit grows."

Remember, always, will you, son,
A habit grows as grows a stream?
Not suddenly a deed is done;
We evil think, we evil dream,
Before we ever evil do;
We form our habits, I and you.

Oh, let us rightly think and act
While down the years we yet may look,
For age is like a cataract
And youth is like a running brook.
If you are on the evil side
Step back, before the stream grows wide.

Draw, Play, Discard

There is a pastime known to some,
A little game entitled rhum,
That even kings consent to play
Upon a dark and rainy day.
For games and tales and other things
Are matters even fit for kings,
If from that game or tale or what
A little lesson may be got.
Though fools will end as they begin
And not a moral find therein,
With ev'ry card they chance to turn
The wise a greater wisdom learn.

There are a half a dozen ways
To play at rhum on rainy days,
For mortals seem to disagree
Just what the method ought to be,
The deal if seven, eight or nine,
For you have your way, I have mine.
But one thing all agreed upon
In ev'ry region I have gone:
That first you draw, and then you play,
And then you throw a card away,
Yes, draw, play, discard, is the rule
Of king and subject, sage and fool.

And in that rule the lesson lies
That proves the wisdom of the wise.
If men would only play the game,
The mighty game of life, the same,
Then more would win and fewer fail,
Whatever troubles might assail.
Fate deals us cards we cannot use,
And yet our cards we still may choose,
Discarding errors, habits, sins,
Until we hold a hand that wins,
Retaining only what is best,
Until each card fits all the rest.

Folks Might Talk

Folks might talk if you should dare
Somethin' different to wear;
Folks might talk perhaps if you
Somethin' different should do;
How you speak or how you walk
Or how you look, some folks might talk.

Folks might talk, and always will;
Morphine couldn't keep 'em still.
Folks might talk—but listen, son:
Very little's ever done
By the ones who try to walk
Day by day so folks won't talk.

Environment

We talk too much about "environment",
The ever-ready alibi for all
The failures of mankind; yet great or small
We are not made by luck or accident.
We win or lose in life, we rise or fall,
As we possess that something mortals call
"Ambition", name for noble discontent.

The lily wakens in a world of mire,
Where coward weeds submerge, nor find the air;
The lily longs to be a lily fair
And seeks the sun above, and does not tire.
Amid the mud she builds her chapel there,
Her pure white altar lays, and does not care—
Above the swamp she lifts her holy spire.

And all the history of all the men,
The forward men who made us what we are,
Records no man environment could bar
From what he sought with sword or song or pen.
To him who has a goal what goal is far?
Who cares for earth whose eyes are on a star?
His dream makes every night a day again!

Not what we are decides, but what we do!
We lose or win in life, we fall or rise,

According to the place we fix our eyes—
The earth around our feet, or heavens blue.
He fails the worst who nothing ever tries,
Who is himself whate'er around him lies—
Oh, make your world, let not your world make you!

If I Shined Shoes

If I shined shoes (and lots of good men do),
I'd sometime like to shine 'em up for you!
Because, if I shined shoes (and some men must),
I know I'd fleck away each speck of dust,
I'd wipe away the memories of the street,
I'd put a shine on sad and weary feet,
On rich or poor, it wouldn't matter whose,
If I shined shoes.

Though other men might have some higher task,
Joy, after all, is not a thing to ask
But thing to win—I'm sure that joy will dwell
In anything that anyone does well.
I'd shine 'em up, and shine 'em up so fine
That folks would say, "That really *is* a shine!"
I'd find the joy that lots of workers lose,
If I shined shoes.

Farming the Earth

There may be nothing wrong with you,
The way you live, the work you do,
But I can very plainly see
Exactly what is wrong with me:
It isn't that I'm indolent
Or dodging duty my intent;
I work as hard as anyone,
And yet I get so little done.
The morning goes, the noon is here,
Before I know the night is near,
And all around me, I regret,
Are things I haven't finished yet.

If I could just get organized!
I oftentimes have realized
Not all that matters is the man;
The man must also have a plan.
The fellows doing mighty deeds
Are reaping crops by planting seeds;
And planting isn't all they do,
They sow the seed and see it through;
They choose their ground, however small,
And then they cultivate it all;
And they are men of greater worth
Than those who try to farm the earth.

With you there may be nothing wrong,
But here's my trouble right along:
I do the things that don't amount
To very much, of no account,
And let a lot of matters go
That really are important, though.
I nibble this, I nibble that,
But never finish what I'm at.
I work as hard as anyone,
And yet I get so little done.
I'd do so much you'd be surprised,
If I could just get organized.

Finish the Task

Here is a great cathedral, here is a noble wall,
Here is a spire all lit with fire as the rays of the sunset fall—
And builders have built them all.

Not by some mighty magic the roofs of the world were made;
Men have dreamed and tools have gleamed and hands have worked at their trade—
With hearts that were unafraid.

What if they grew discouraged, what if they ceased their song,
Counted the brick and turned heart-sick and said that the plan was wrong?—
Yes, said it would take too long?

You who would master knowledge, you who would capture fame,
Men have dreamed and tools have gleamed and red was the forge's flame—
And so you must build the same.

Not by some mighty magic the splendor of life is spun,
Though your fingers ache, the brick you must take and must lay them one by one—
And work till the thing is done.

Fruit or Weeds

To do each day allotted tasks,
To come each night to well-earned rest—
No matter what a mortal asks,
He finds this fortune always best.
Who lives for leisure does not know
The only leisure worth the while
Comes after labor—only so
We learn to smile.

I have seen those who need not toil;
And often I have pitied more
Than any farmer tilling soil,
Or any merchant keeping store,
Or those who mould, or those who write,
The man with naught to do but play,
Who saw behind him every night
An empty day.

For weeds will grow in idle ground,
In idle acres, idle lives;
Where someone labors fruit is found,
Where hands are busy beauty thrives.
Your life each day may bloom with deeds,
Your life each day new beauty bear;
On you depends if fruit or weeds
Shall flourish there.

Good Morning

He always said "Good Morning!" when to work we
gathered in,
He seemed to think "Good Morning!" was a good way
to begin—
"Good Morning!" to the humble, and "Good Morn-
ing!" to the high;
Why, you couldn't ever grumble at "Good Morning!"
from a guy.

Just his cap he used to doff us and he used to wave his
hand,
But it started off the office—well, you may not un-
derstand,
But it sort of smoothed the wrinkle you had gathered
overnight,
There was something in the twinkle of his eye that set
you right.

And the meanest little rabbit and the big boss stern and
sad
Somehow sort of got the habit the "Good Morning!"
fellow had.
For it seemed to lighten labor, though our labor was a
pile,
Just to greet an office neighbor with "Good Morning!"
and a smile.

Well, he doesn't say "Good Morning!" in the office any more,
For one day he saw the morning break upon a brighter shore.
But I'll bet that golden morning that the angels who await
Shouted to his soul, "Good Morning!" when they saw him at the gate.

Only Now and Then

Now and then a war is won in a single fight,
Now and then a thing is done in a day or night.
Even fame, or fortune blind, thus will come to men;
But it happens, you will find, only now and then.

Now and then a man achieves honor and acclaim,
Now and then the world believes that by luck they came.
No one knows about the years, things that might have been,
No one knows about the tears, bitter now and then.

Now and then men talk of chance, mourn about their lot.
Now and then good men advance, with a chance or not!
Knuckle down and buckle in, try, and try again!
Wishers and complainers win only now and then.

The Fighting Few

Roses beside the dusty road
And lilies in the darkest pool;
I say that what makes sage or fool
Is not his place, is not his load,
But just his soul, the soul inside
Not discontent, nor satisfied

The rosebud does not always find
Itself within a garden fair.
If roses only blossomed where
The sun was bright, the breeze was kind,
The rose would die, for what survives?
The things that battle for their lives.

And souls that have to fight for place,
Yes, souls like lilies in the mud,
And not its men of royal blood
Shall long perpetuate a race.
What sires the greatest sons will give?
The sires that have to fight to live.

The rose that seldom feels the dew,
The lily in the darkest vale,
The ship that needs to breast the gale—
Thank God you're of the fighting few!
Remember what gives men their might
Are things for which they have to fight.

Good Timber

The tree that never had to fight
For sun and sky and air and light,
That stood upon the open plain
And always had its share of rain,
Never became a forest king
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil
To heaven from the common soil,
Who never had to win his share
Of sun and sky and light and air,
Never became a manly man,
But lived and died as he began.

Good timber does not grow in ease;
The stronger wind the tougher trees,
The farther sky the greater length,
The more the storm the more the strength;
By sun and cold, by rains and snows,
In tree or man good timber grows.

Where thickest stands the forest growth
We find the patriarchs of both;
And they hold converse with the stars
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife—
This is the common law of life.

Give Them the Best

Sure they will scoff at your scheming,
  Sure they will question your plan,
Sure they will laugh at your dreaming,
  So ev'ry dreamer began.
Ask of the fellows who do things,
  Ask of the fellows who won:
What thought the world of the new things,
  Things that had never been done?
Scheme for them, dream for them, labor,
  Whether they want it or not:
Pencil or chisel or sabre,
  Give them the best you have got!

Sure they will pass it unheeded,
  This that is soul of your soul,
Grudging the word that is needed
  Helping you on to the goal.
Must I with something pursue them,
  Begging from door unto door?
When what is common will do them,
  Why should I offer them more?
Why? In achieving is living!
  Why? Are your visions forgot?
Give for the sake of the giving!
  Give them the best you have got!

Though the whole office refuses,
Though you are scorned by the host,
You are the fellow who loses
When you do less than the most.
Stop not for sulking or sorrow,
Keep at the thing you are at—
Doing your best, that tomorrow
You may do better than that.
If to your goal you are going
It does not matter a lot:
Still you are gaining and growing—
Give them the best you have got!

Good Enough

I saw some builders laying brick,
  Where one was needed, two;
The wall was twenty inches thick,
  Where ten or twelve would do;
And some who saw the builders build
With much of merriment were filled,
  Because the work were quickly done
  If they had laid not two, but one.

The wall they builded twice too strong,
  Twice greater than the need.
Yet who shall say they builded wrong
  Who built so well indeed?
The hour may come they wish to rear
A greater super-structure here,
  Perhaps some storm some later day
  Shall prove they built the better way.

For something only good enough
  Is little good at all;
Yes, men must build of better stuff
  Than that, who build a wall.
Yes, men must build their ships that sail
Not for the zephyr but the gale,
  And men must build each hope that gleams
  For greater needs and larger dreams.

You cannot build a thing too well.
Remember, will you, son?
I doubt if any structure fell
That was too nobly done.
A little work may get you through,
A little study seem to do,
But good enough is not the test—
Some moment will demand the best.

Life Is a Mirror

Life is a mirror—smile at it,
And it will smile at you,
Will give you back a little bit
Of everything you do.
The world will give you frown for frown
And give you grin for grin,
And things look up or things look down
As you look in.

Life is a mirror—give it joy,
And joy you'll likely find;
For everything you do, my boy,
Is mirrored in the mind.
Unkindness, kindness, hate or love,
You find in anyone
Are, after all, reflections of
Yourself, my son.

Lift Your Aim

We shot our arrows toward the sun
  Beside the castle wall.
His arrow was the highest one,
  The highest one of all.
Another archer said, "You win."
He answered, "No, I but begin.
  No archer wins, or ever will;
  He goes on aiming higher still."

We never win, we only make
  A mark more near the skies,
Keep shooting for the shooting's sake,
  Not just to win the prize.
The thing today we call the best
Tomorrow is tomorrow's test:
  We never win, we merely find
  Another mark to leave behind.

This makes us archers, makes us men,
  And that is all that will:
To shoot, and then to aim again
  A little higher still.
However high your arrow went,
Be not with one success content:
  Still higher look! Look not below,
  But lift your aim, and bend the bow!

A Good One

One man is a king, and another a cook,
Another a leader of leaders;
One man prints a sign, and another a book,
But each has his circle of readers.
The man with a pick, or the man with a pen,
Whichever he is isn't vital;
It's easy to tell the importance of men,
And it isn't a matter of title.

The world has experienced curious kings,
Kings, frankly, who flounder and blunder;
The world has had cooks who made excellent things,
Whose soups were an absolute wonder.
So that's the distinction that matters the most,
In either the doctor or digger.
Bad king or good cook—which the better can boast,
Yes, which of the two is the bigger?

The man on the bridge or the deck of a boat,
What counts is the sort of a sailor.
I'm certain of this, that a knave in a coat
Is less of a man than the tailor.
A fool now and then may look down upon me;
I never have yet understood one;
What matters what any man happens to be,
As long as a man is a good one?

Hand and Heart

The vision that the painter dreams
  Upon the canvas he must trace;
In every art it always seems
  That labor, too, must have its place.
We need not argue which the part
Of larger value, hand or heart;
  But this I know, that neither one
  Without the other gets things done.

The architect may nobly plan,
  But labor places stone on stone.
I only know that neither man
  Can build the edifice alone.
I am not here to say—nor ask—
Which has the more important task;
  I know that neither one of these
  Shall lift one tow'r above the trees.

An empire or a cottage roof,
  A table or cathedral spire,
Why need we cry aloud for proof
  If hand or heart they more require?
We know this much: To make all things
The pencil moves, the hammer swings,
  That both of these men must employ,
  And all may feel an equal joy.

So I would say to labor, toil
With lighter heart and larger view,
And say to learning, not for spoil
Alone achieve the things you do,
And say to both, to both be fair,
Your conduct and your corners square,
Knowing full well that neither one
Without the other gets things done.

A Bowl of Roses

Upon her desk a bowl of roses,
A merry picture on the wall—
Oh, life is not what grief supposes,
Life has its roses, after all.
There are so many things of beauty,
There are so many things so fair,
That there is joy in every duty,
And something sweet in every care.

Each day we have our tasks around us,
Each day we have our work to do,
And yet I pray we all have found us,
Amid our toil, the roses, too.
Kind thoughts the heavy load will lighten—
Life's hardest road is picturesque
To her who keeps, her day to brighten,
A bowl of roses on her desk.

Hearsay

In every town, in every street,
In nearly every house, you meet
A little imp who wriggles in,
With half a sneer and half a grin,
And climbs upon your rocking-chair,
Or creeps upon you anywhere,
And, when he gets you very near,
Just whispers something in your ear,
Some rumor of another's shame—
And little "Hearsay" is his name.

He never really claims to know;
He's only "heard" that it is so;
And then he whispers it to you,
So you will go and whisper, too.
For, if enough will pass along,
The rumor, even though it's wrong—
If John tells Henry, Henry Joe,
And Joe tells Mary, Mary Flo,
And Flo tells Mildred, Mildred Ruth—
It very soon may pass for truth.

You understand, this little elf,
He doesn't say he knows, himself.
He doesn't claim it's really true—
He only whispers it to you,

Because he knows you'll go and tell
Some other whisperer as well;
And so, before the setting sun,
He gets the devil's mischief done,
And there is less of joy and good
Around your little neighborhood.

Look out for Hearsay! When he sneaks
Inside the house, and slander speaks,
Just ask the proof in every case.
Just ask the name and date and place,
And, if he says he only "heard",
Declare you don't believe a word;
And tell him you will not repeat
The silly chatter of the street—
However gossips smile and smirk,
Refuse to do the devil's work.

Happy Days

Happy days—they seem to some
Something always yet to come
When they never need to toil,
When they're done with tool and soil,
When they have a little more
Money than they had before,
When they have the wealth to buy
Pleasures present days deny.
Happy days—they always seem
To the dreamer but a dream.

Yet the fellow at a bench
Busy with a saw or wrench,
And the fellow following
Turning furrows in the spring—
Surely there is joy in this
That they never need to miss,
Humming pulley, singing bird,
Always all around them heard.
Happy days are never far—
All around us always are.

Happy days! Our happiness
(Always nearer than we guess)
We must gather as we go
Through the shop, along the row.
We who wait ourselves deceive:

Having joy, for joy we grieve
Till our joy is left behind.
It may happen we shall find,
Looking back to bench or plow,
That our happy days were now.

Progress

On ev'ry road, where'er it lead,
Through the green wood, across the plain,
We pause, the signs of old to read
Before we journey on again—
Consult the stars, the mountains dumb,
To learn how far our feet have come.

Life is a journey. Let us pause
Tonight when dusky eve departs,
Unmoved by sneers or men's applause,
And ask the question of our hearts:
Yea, are we farther on the way
Today, tonight, than yesterday?

The road is long, the world is wide,
And many are the valleys there
That lure the traveler aside
From out the sterner thoroughfare.
Today was crimson with delight;
But, are you farther, friend, tonight?

The Higher Court

Two judges sit within a court—Judge Heart and Justice Mind;
And there each Purpose must report, and there will judgment find.
There Justice Mind will first inquire and first the Purpose tries;
There Justice Mind of each Desire will question, "Is it wise?"

And then Ambition argues this, and Lawyer Logic so,
While Caution speaks with emphasis in careful words and slow.
Then learned old Experience with precedents appears
And offers them in evidence, the wisdom of the years.

But Progress is an advocate both eloquent and young;
No musty statute he will state, he speaks the future's tongue.
And he the action may defend, although the rest forbear,
And prove the wisest at the end of all attorneys there.

Then Justice Mind will lift his hand and bid the pleaders pause;
"Now, gentlemen, I understand the logic and the laws."

And, if the Purpose favor find, and wise the time and
and place,
"Approved!" will answer Justice Mind, and call an-
other case.

But, even if great Mind approve, there sits a higher now
Who must agree before you move the action to allow,
A higher judge will seek the fact, a judge supreme,
apart;
For you must have for every Act approval of the Heart.

Ambition here is counsel weak and Eloquence is still,
And only Conscience dares to speak, to ask the judge's
will.
One Book will do, one Law will do, as fixed as day and
night,
For old Judge Heart will ask of you one question, "Is
it right?"

Is That Your Best?

Is that your best? Whatever task
Is yours, your duty is to ask
Yourself the question—this the test
Of ev'ry job—"Is that my best?"

For nothing less than that will do.
No job is finished, work is through,
No task is done beyond a doubt,
Until you fully work it out—

Until your study fails to find
One bolt to tighten, knot to bind,
One word to change, one sum to prove,
One weed to pull, one rock remove.

So many only fairly well
Make what they make, sell what they sell,
Do fairly well the thing they're at,
And stop, and let it go at that.

They might have sung a better song,
Or made a corner doubly strong,
Or wiped a joint or set an ad
A little better than they had

Some other time—but were content
With yesterday's accomplishment.
Yet yesterday is but to show
New things to do, new roads to go.

Men must be made of better stuff
Than those content with "good enough";
And so, my boy, make this the test
Of ev'ry job: "Is that my best?"

The Little House

Christ might have chosen for his cradle
  The castle of a king.
He chose instead a lowly bed—
  And now the angels sing
No royal couch with regal gem
But just a barn in Bethlehem.

Oh, you who live in little houses
  Whose doors are small and low,
You are not wise who would despise
  The dwellings that you know—
Whate'er your house, if free of sin,
Then Christ will come to dwell therein.

Heroes

When but a boy I used to read
Of many a great, heroic deed,
  Of men who fought
    And men who died,
  Until I thought
    How gladly I'd
Some giant slay, some cause advance,
If I could only get the chance.

But time went on, and never once
I got a chance at hero stunts;
  No maiden come
    For me to save,
  Nor rescue from
    No watery grave,
No giant ever raised my wrath,
No dragon ever crossed my path.

And even now no mornin' brings
No extry-ordinary things
  For me to do,
    But just my job—
  To see it through
    Without a sob
Or whine or whimper or complaint,
No matter what it is, or ain't.

And yet I think, think quite a bit,
It really takes a lot more grit
To work without
The world's applause
And never doubt
And never pause—
Not when folks yell and hip-hooray,
But all the while, and every day.

Still Bend the Oar

We cannot change the rivers' courses
Because they journey to the sea,
We cannot fight the hidden forces
That shape our daily destiny,
We cannot alter wind or weather,
The winter cold or summer warm—
We can but hold ourselves together,
And face the storm.

We cannot change the breeze's blowing,
If it be rain or sun it bring,
We cannot change the river's flowing,
We cannot alter anything.
But may we, when disaster meets us,
Behold the vision of a shore—
Yea, when the current backward beats us,
Still bend the oar.

Keep On

I pity him who's prouder of his past
  Than of his future. What we hope to do
It is that makes us great. Success at last
  Comes not to him who thinks that he is through,
  But him who finds some purpose to pursue

Beyond today's achievement. He achieves
  The most who camps upon no little peak
But, standing on the summit, still believes
  That there are other summits he may seek.
  Who speaks great truths has other truths to speak.

Who paints a picture, lovely though it be,
  If he fare farther, farther on may find
Some valley lovelier, more majestic sea,
  Than any vision he has left behind,
  He may immortalize for all mankind.

I pity him who looks at some machine
  Of long invention, saying it is done;
Within are secrets still unknown, unseen,
  He may discover ere tomorrow's sun.
  A task just finished is a task begun.

Columbus, sailing westward to explore
Beyond the knowledge of the well-content,
Touched foot at last upon an island shore
And raised the flag of Spain and homeward went—
Yet came again, and found a continent.

Stop not upon life's islands! Yonder there
New islands lift a little to the west,
New continents await you everywhere!
The past, though glorious, was but the test—
Was but the proof you yet will do your best.

Keeping Them Coming

A wonderful start is a wonderful thing,
Your heart full of hope and your head full of schemes,
For, oh, it is easy to laugh and to sing
When just setting out for the land of your dreams.
Good starters are many, good finishers few;
Though fortune may follow, good luck may attend,
When day's at the dawning and silver the dew,
It's keeping them coming that counts in the end.

And ore for the smelter, or logs for the saw,
Or cars for the shipper, or steel for the mill,
Or sales o'er the counter, or grain from the straw,
Whatever it is, we can win if we will.
It isn't production a day or a week,
It isn't the size of the order you send;
Whatever our labor, whatever we seek,
It's keeping them coming that counts in the end!

No target is hit by a flash in the pan,
No race ever won by a spurt at the start—
It's playing the woman and playing the man,
It's steady of purpose and sturdy of heart!
Whatever the world is expecting of you,
What matters is this: Can it safely depend
On the things that you make, on the tasks that you do?—
It's keeping them coming that counts in the end!

The Man Who Beats You

'Tis not the other man who beats you
A lot of times you lose, my son;
'Tis not the other man defeats you,
The victor when the day is done.
The thing that often whips a man
Is not the race the other ran
For title, honor, place, or pelf—
A man may often beat himself.

When foes condemn, or friendship flatters,
Though hate may blame, or love excuse,
Remember, boy, what mostly matters,
The thing that made you win or lose,
The thing that mattered was the way
You held the pace yourself today;
Were you as faithful, you as fit?
Or did you falter just a bit?

Behold the victor: You will find him
True to himself, the truest test;
Whoever were ahead, behind him,
He did one thing, he did his best.
Yes, from the pistol to the line,
The thing that matters, boy of mine,
Is not how well the others run,
But how you run yourself, my son.

Lincoln, the Boy

So many boys had so much more
  Than he could have, this Lincoln boy,
So many boys who passed his door,
  Were richer clad, knew brighter joy,
He might have said, as some have said,
"What hope have I to get ahead?
  Whatever other boys may be,
  There isn't any chance for me."

He might have whimpered, might have whined,
  He might have even learned to hate;
But envy marks the little mind,
  The jealous never are the great.
Yet Lincoln saw the ivy toil
Toward heaven from the common soil.
  All nature seemed one truth to teach:
  They never rise who never reach.

He did not care what others had,
  He only sought what he had not;
And, richer than the richest lad
  That ever passed that lonely spot,
He reached for knowledge, reached for truth.
Go learn the tale of Lincoln's youth:
  How low his station, high his goal,
  Though poor his body, rich his soul.

There was a chance; there always is
  For ev'ry boy in ev'ry time;
And Lincoln knew that chance of his
  Was not to envy but to climb.
However low the lowest round,
It's always higher than the ground,
  However high a peak may rise,
  We reach it looking toward the skies.

Labor Day

This day is Labor's, dedicate
  To those who toil. A little while
The wheels are still, the cargoes wait,
  Laid down the shovel, needle, file,
While labor stops to meditate.

Whom do we serve? Not him who hires.
  What is our pay? Not daily wage.
The things we make mankind requires,
  Our structures serve the coming age,
Our furnace fires are signal fires.

And this, I dream, is Labor's dream:
  A greater wage for greater worth,
A larger part in God's great scheme,
  A happier race, a better earth,
Because of better ditch or seam.

The Man Behind

The band is on the quarter-deck, the starry flag unfurled;
The air is mad with music and with cheers;
The ship is bringing home to us the homage of the world
And writing new our name upon the years.
Her officer is on the bridge; we greet him with hurrahs;
But someone says, "Not he the glory won;
Not he alone who wears the braid deserves the loud applause,
Oh, don't forget the man behind the gun!"

'Tis said that to embattled seas our ship sailed forth at dawn,
Unheeding shot, unheeding hidden mine;
And through the thunders of the fight went steaming bravely on,
The nation's floating fortress on the brine.
And never throbbing engine stopped, nor parted plate or seam,
In all that bloody day from sun to sun;
The good ship sang her battle cry in hissing clouds of steam
To cheer anew the man behind the gun.

I look upon her shining bore, her engine's pulsing heart,
I look upon her bulwarks shaped of steel;
I know there is another art, as great as gunner's art,
That makes the world at arms in homage kneel.
This ship, defying shot and shell, defying winds and seas,
Is fruit of honest labor, rightly done;
The man who built the ship, my lads, remember him, for he's
The man behind the man behind the gun!

Each Man to His Trade

Each man to his trade, ev'ry tool to the hand
For which it was made—for so heaven has planned.
Each man has the bent, and each woman the art,
For which they were meant, as a player his part.

Yes, building a house, or contriving a song,
Or bridging a stream, or just plowing along,
Each man to his trade, to the load he may lift—
Even driving a horse is a natural gift.

Each man to his trade. I am certain, my son,
That a gear that is made as it ought to be done
Is of worthier sort than a law that is wrong,
Or a measure too short, or a sermon too long.

Mediocrity

Of all the tempters of mankind,
The one most dangerous you find
  Is that wee devil who will come,
  When work is hard or troublesome,
And lull to sleep the weary mind
  With life's most subtle opium—
Will ask the artisan to be
Content with mediocrity.

"That's good enough," temptation cries,
And some plan fails or some dream dies;
  Yes, men who toil and write and teach
  Will listen to the tempter's speech;
No more the soul the summit tries
  Just when it waits within our reach—
Surrendering, when victory
Is near, to mediocrity.

"That's good enough—why labor more?"
The tempter whispers o'er and o'er,
  But well you know it is not yet
  The things you dreamed of ere you met
This elf of idleness. Before
  You reach the mark that you have set
You know the thing must better be—
Yet yield to mediocrity.

And so ourselves our souls we cheat—
Who might be victors, find defeat.
For when we fail to do our best
We do not lose the single test
But other tests that we shall meet—
Who slights the one will slight the rest.
They fail the worst who come to be
Content with mediocrity.

Resolutions

Not what you suddenly decide
To quit because the year is ending,
Not what, your bosom swelled with pride,
To do next year you are intending,
Will make you better very long—
But thinking right and keeping strong
Day in, day out, week, month and year,
Will really count for something here.

Not what you suddenly declare,
Some simple virtue shouting loudly,
Not some insignia you wear,
Some new-found halo, tilted proudly,
Will really get you very far;
Not what you say, but what you are
Will really make a man of you—
Not what you promise, what you do.

The Mean Job

The world has so much work to do,
  Has work that must be done,
And neither he nor I nor you
  Nor she nor anyone,
No man or woman, is a bit
Too good to do the worst of it.

Think not your white and dainty hands
  Too good for common toil,
For someone has to plant the lands
  And someone stir the soil;
And none but selfish souls would ask
Exception from the common task.

I hate a loafer—even more
  I think I hate a snob
Who thinks himself too mighty for
  Some ordinary job;
Because, whatever task it is,
If hands must do it, why not his?

The lofty labor and the low,
  Whatever it may be,
Must all be done by someone, so
  Why not by you and me?
No job's too small for me or you,
Nor we too big that job to do.

The Moral of Morals

The maxims are many, and many are fine:
The worth of a penny, the stitch saving nine,
The virtue of blindness when other men chide,
The kindness of kindness, the folly of pride.
We hear them from Mother, we get them from Dad,
And yet there's another I think I would add:
The loafer, the rover, the dreamer, may scoff—
But you can't put things over by putting them off.

The saving of stitches, the storing of pence,
The gaining of riches, the using of sense,
Are never a matter of mottoes we know,
However men flatter the wisdom we show.
We get there by walking, whatever the quest,
Not merely by talking, directing the rest.
To harvest the clover your coat you must doff—
You can't put things over by putting them off.

The wise write the mottoes, but wiser is he
Who digs in the grottoes where jewels may be.
The maxims are many, and many are fine;
The treasure, if any, is down in the mine.
So here is the moral of morals, my son:
Whatever the laurel, that laurel was *won*.
The loafer, the rover, the dreamer, may scoff,
But you can't put things over by putting them off.

The Most Essential Man

I asked a man with many men
  Around him every day
What man was needed now and then
  The most in every way.
Of all the men in office, store
  Or shop, or anywhere,
What man is really wanted more
  Than any other there?

"I'll tell you, friend," was his reply,
  "The man who's needed worst,
The man, when something goes awry,
  I send for right at first:
It isn't one with theories
  Attention then attracts;
The man you want in times like these
  Is the one who has the facts.

"If competition beats us out,
  If someone starts a fuss,
If someone we're in doubt about,
  Or he's in doubt of us,
I want to have a man at hand,
  Have somewhere I can go
And have the facts at my command,
  The things I need to know.

"They'll 'look it up,' a lot of men,
A lot investigate,
But when they find the answer then
It often comes too late.
If I were young, I think I'd plan
My work, my daily acts,
To be that most essential man,
The man who has the facts."

The Gift of Laughter

Wisdom is the guide post set beside the road,
Patience is the worker, bearer of the load.
Straight ahead Ambition leads you day by day—
Laughter is the comrade all along the way.

Don't you ever lose him, don't you ever part
From this merry fellow—hold him to your heart.
There will come a moment, there will come a mile,
When, the hill to master, you will need a smile.

Wisdom may desert you, Judgment may go wrong,
Patience in disaster not be overstrong,
Even your Ambition, that may falter, too—
But the gift of Laughter, that will get you through.

Once in Awhile

Once in awhile the world goes wrong,
And then for awhile we worry about it,
Yes, worry too much and worry too long—
We really should worry along without it.
Though we sometimes meet with a rocky mile,
Remember it's only once in awhile.

Once in awhile folks seem unkind,
And then we worry and let it fret us,
But it's only once in awhile, you find,
And we still can laugh if our hearts will let us.
Though things may happen to someone's smile,
Remember it's only once in awhile.

Once in awhile you find a man
The sort of a man who just won't worry.
And no one downs him, no one can—
He comes right back, and he comes in a hurry.
Folks do us wrong, but it helps a pile
To know it's only once in awhile.

Once in awhile a day is sad,
With an angry word or an angry letter,
But I'll just think of the fun I've had
And wait for a time when the times are better.
Though we sometimes meet with a rocky mile,
Remember it's only once in awhile.

Not What We Do, How Well

Life isn't all in big amounts,
  Nor greatness in a title:
It isn't what we do that counts—
  How well we do is vital.
The little tasks and little things
  Are what in time will tell:
Not what we do the glory brings,
  But if we do it well.

The humble task of humble hands
  Has just as much of beauty,
As much efficiency demands
  As any other duty.
The lowest brick in any wall
  Is still the brick that made it;
The edifice will stand or fall
  How well or poor we laid it.

We work together, you with me,
  Whate'er we build or fashion:
Our pride should be our honesty,
  And quality our passion.
The little tasks and little things
  Are what in time will tell—
Not what we do the glory brings,
  But if we do it well.

An Office

An office is a funny thing: Each morning certain men
And certain girls and certain boys come into it again
And hang their coats on certain pegs, their hats on certain hooks,
And sit them down at certain desks in front of certain books.
They all have certain work to do, to slight it is a crime,
For it brings in certain dollars if it's done a certain time.
And then at just a certain hour, in sunshine or in rain,
They close their desks and hurry out to catch a certain train.

An office is an awful thing, when that is all there is,
When each one has his certain work and certain way of his
And wallows in a certain rut and never seems to see
That there are certain other ones in life as well as he.
For we would find a certain fun in certain other ways
If we would give a word of cheer on certain busy days—
When problems vex, when certain things require a helping hand,
Would give a certain sympathy that mortals understand.

An office is a pleasant thing—at least, a certain kind
That has a certain brotherhood, where day by day you find
Some neighbor with a new idea he's glad to pass along,
A certain sort of friendliness, a certain sort of song.
There is a certain duty that we owe to other men,
To help them when they need a lift, to steady them again.
An office can become in time, to man and girl and boy,
A certain kind of fellowship, and work a certain joy.

The Time for Things

There's a time to part and a time to meet,
There's a time to sleep and a time to eat,
There's a time to work and a time to play,
There's a time to sing and a time to pray,
There's a time that's glad and a time that's blue,
There's a time to plan and a time to do,
There's a time to grin and to show your grit—
But there never yet was a time to quit!

One Faithful Friend

My clothes don't fit, my face ain't right;
(Just look at it—ain't that a fright?)
But I'm all there, such as I be,
And purty fair, for folks like me.

I've got no hold on heaps of wealth,
I've got no gold but hope and health
And peace and joy—that's all I've got,
And yet, my boy, that's quite a lot.

I must agree my face is wrong,
And yet you see, I git along.
It's wrong indeed, I must admit,
But I don't need to look at it.

I may not thrive like some folks do,
But I'm alive, and I'll pull through.
For cold or hot, or dark or dawn,
One friend I've got to lean upon.

Yes, high or low, I've got a friend
On whom I know I can depend
By day or night, by land or sea.
You guessed it right. Uh, huh, it's me.

Pay Night

There is dancin' tonight at the bow'ry,
And the boys and the girls will be there,
And the girls will be dressed in the best of their best,
And the boys will have grease on their hair.
There'll be pink lemonade in the arbor,
There'll be things you can buy at the stand—
Oh, the world's mighty fine on a pay night,
When you've got a week's work in your hand!

Oh, the world's mighty fine on a pay night,
And the street will be full of the crowd,
For they'll all be in town, walkin' up, walkin' down,
And they'll all be so gay and so proud.
For the trees by the road are a-blossom,
And the grass mighty sweet with the dew;
Oh, the world's mighty fine on a pay night,
For then what's a dollar or two?

But what's that I hear at the window,
And who's that who rattled the door?
Why, the wind's swung around, and the folks they have found
That it won't be so fine any more.
Oh, the world's mighty fine on a pay night,
But it gits mighty cold in the fall,
And when old Mister Wind come a-howlin'
Then you ask what you done with it all!

The Other Fellow's Job

I seldom quarrel with the universe;
Things could be better, could be better far,
But, on the other hand, they could be worse—
And so I rather leave them as they are.
But one thing, though, could easily be done;
If Bill could only make a trade with Bob
The world would be so glad—if everyone
Could only have the other fellow's job!

The other fellow surely has a snap:
If at a desk he works, he needn't roam,
He needn't wander up and down the map—
He knows the joy and comfort of a home.
Or, if the other fellow something sells
Upon the road, a lucky man is he—
To see the country, live at good hotels,
And have a job with some variety.

The other fellow!—luckiest of men!—
Here's where creation surely made a slip:
The fellow on the road should push a pen,
The fellow at a desk should tote a grip.
We never shall be happy, truly glad,
We never shall be really comforted,
Until we trade the job we've always had
And get the other fellow's job instead.

I see no other way to do—unless
We might do this: Forget a little while
The easy jobs that other men possess,
Get busy with our own, and with a smile.
For, after all, they're not so different:
Each has its time of laughter and of sob,
But each the joy of service. Be content—
Your job's as good as any fellow's job.

Only a Few

Only a few a fortune find,
Only a few the laurel bear,
To only a few is fortune kind,
Only a few life's titles wear.
Many there are the climb begin,
Only a few the summit gain;
Many the men who hope to win,
Only a few the peak attain.

Only a few—I wonder why?
This I know: On a road so long
You must not murmur, you dare not die,
Soul and body must both be strong.
Men there are with a hero's will,
Laboring on in the dawn or dew,
Men there are who are fighters still,
Whatever their fate—but only a few.

The Other Half

Well, here's the day half gone again,
  And nothing really done.
Yes, seven, eight, and nine, and ten,
  Like sheep the hours have run,
Have skipped and scampered on their way,
And here I am half through the day,
  And even tired a little bit,
  And not a thing to show for it.

But, I remember, long ago
  My Mother's point of view.
She had her days when things were slow,
  As well as I and you.
"Life's like a baking, son," she said.
"A day is like an apple red:
  In many a baking I have had
  An apple just a little bad.

"And, son, you often have a day,
  A morn with little done,
And yet you needn't throw away
  The rest of it, my son.
Although the morning may be gone,
There still is time to carry on.
  Take up your load, take up your staff,
  Make something of the other half."

And so she sat and made her pies
  And used her paring knife,
A simple woman much too wise
  To waste a lot in life.
Because a day was not the best
She did not throw away the rest,
  But, when the morning went too soon,
  Made something of the afternoon.

A Few Short Words

Earth, sea and sky, morn, noon and night,
  Song, smile, and grass, and birds,
Star, sun and moon, and life, and light,
  These make our wealth of words.
The best to write, the best to say,
  To name the things that please,
The best to use by night or day,
  Are just such words as these.

Be brief in thought, be brief in art,
  Not long in word or speech,
Each word a word to reach the heart,
  And thus the soul to reach.
A few short words will state a fact,
  A few short words a creed;
Be brief in speech and straight in act,
  So he who runs may read.

Playing School

Playing school when school is done—
That seems hard to understand;
With the fields to romp and run,
And no duty near at hand,
Children love to gather so,
With the "pupils" in a row
And the "teacher" in her place,
Straight of back and stern of face.

Playing school when school is out,
In the glad vacation days—
Funny thing to be about,
Funny thing in lots of ways.
You would think they had enough
Reading, writing, other stuff,
But they sit, the summer through
With their "problems" still to do.

Playing school, and so would we,
Though so much we may complain;
Often hard the work may be
On the body, on the brain;
But we love it, after all,
And, until the shadows fall,
We shall find our pleasure, too,
In the work we have to do.

Pump Water or Drown

I said to a fellow 'way down in a ditch,
"You labor exceedingly hard,
In fact in a manner alarming, and which
I with some apprehension regard.
Oh, why do you do it? Oh, why never pause?"
I asked, with a bit of a frown.
He answered me cheerily, "Merely because
I have to pump water, or drown."

The fellow in business, the person in trade,
Is not unaccustomed to hear
The selfsame objection, or similar, made
Some busiest day of the year.
It may be the day that your note will come due,
The day that the market comes down,
The kind of a day that will happen to you
When you have to pump water or drown.

It's all very well, all the valued advice;
We thank you, good friends, one and all;
Life's all very simple, it's all very nice,
Till prices are rising, or fall.
And, though we would like to get out now and then
And loaf in the country, or town,
Occasions will come to the wealthiest men
When they have to pump water or drown.

Pudding First

The baby ate her pudding first,
And then she didn't want her bread;
She thought potatoes were the worst—
She didn't like a thing, she said.
Then Mother wisely shook her head
And said, "That always is the way—
You've learned the lesson well today
Of folks who eat their pudding first.

"Our life is largely common things;
It's bread to eat, and work to do.
They must come first, for labor brings
The pleasure that will come to you.
First find your task, and see it through,
And fun will be just twice the fun,
Because the work to do is done—
Our life is largely common things.

"For folks who first their pudding eat,
Before the common things they need,
Make bitter things that would be sweet,
And bitter bitter things indeed.
For pleasure labor must succeed
If pleasure it would really be.
That is the lesson, seems to me,
For folks who first their pudding eat.

"The folks who eat their pudding first,
The common bread of labor spurn,
In age with poverty are cursed
Because they never seemed to learn
Before we spend we first must earn,
Must earn with labor time to play—
Not throw our golden youth away,
Like folks who eat their pudding first."

Too Sure Too Soon

When you think you have it coppered, when you've
nearly made the grade,
When you almost have the order or you've almost
made the trade,
There's a certain little danger that may puncture your
balloon:
When you're sure you've won the battle, don't you
be too sure too soon.

For the horse that starts to loafing when it's almost
to the wire
Has been very often beaten by a nag that didn't tire;
And a man may think he's winning, and be laughing
like a loon—
But, to really cop the money, don't you be too sure
too soon,

Putting Off

Putting off work is just putting on load,
Something to carry the rest of the road.
Loading tomorrow with things of today
Makes it hard going the whole of the way.
Ev'ry tomorrow has work of its own—
Leave for tomorrow tomorrow's alone.
Many are vanquished who maybe had won
But they were burdened with duties undone,
Labors left over, unfinished, forgot—
There is the secret of winning or not.
Fellows who win are the fellows who do
What is at hand, and who carry it through!

Putting off troubles is brushing off flies:
Just for a moment on wings they arise,
But, when you think you are rid of them, then
Back they come buzzing and gather again,
Just when you think you are rid of a score,
Back they come buzzing, and bringing some more!
Yes, they are little—but many's the thing,
Though it is little, that carries a sting;
Often the trouble that hurts us the worst
Is some little trouble neglected at first;
For many a blossom is choked by a weed
You left in your garden to scatter its seed.

Putting off worries is putting on woe;
Settle them yes or else settle them no.
Leaving unsettled the problems we find
Brings half a hundred to follow behind.
Men may evade them, but still they abide—
Either you ride them, or else they will ride.
Men of decision, when worry they meet,
Work out their problems and worry defeat.
Fools run to cover, and cowards delay;
Settle your problems, and settle today.
Putting off troubles is brushing off flies—
Rise up and swat them, whatever their size!

Someone Said

Someone says that someone said,
Something said concerning you;
How it is you get ahead,
How it is you never do.
Whether false or whether true,
Soon you're worried through and through,
Courage gone and pleasure fled
Over something "someone said".

"Someone says" and someone near
Brings the story, lass or lad,
Lets you know what others here
Say about you, good or bad.
Often some a little add
To the story that they had—
There is someone, never fear,
Glad to tell you what they "hear".

Someone says that someone said;
Well, forget it! Don't you mind!
There's a forward path to tread,
Never stop to look behind.
What the tale, whatever kind,
To the gossip deaf and blind,
Shape your course and go ahead—
Never mind what "someone said".

Now

Dream not too much of what you'll do tomorrow,
How well you'll work perhaps another year;
Tomorrow's chance you do not need to borrow—
Today's is here.

Boast not too much of mountains you will master,
The while you linger in the vale below;
To dream is well, but plodding brings us faster
To where we go.

Talk not too much about some new endeavor
You mean to make a little later on;
Who idles now will idle on forever
Till life is gone.

Swear not some day to break some habit's fetter,
When this old year is dead and passed away;
If you have need of living wiser, better,
Begin today.

Start Over

When things go wrong, as some things do,
When something's wrong, the plan, or you,
When off the track or off the trail
Or off the course you meant to sail,
When false the lights along the shore,
Remember you have one thing more:
Start over!

When in the valley, when the peak
Was what you really meant to seek,
Or when temptation leads you down
From mountain heights to Idletown,
Whatever folly hinders you,
There's always one thing you can do:
Start over!

When whipped in battle, then defeat
You meet you only seem to meet;
For he who loses unafraid
Is not defeated, but delayed.
When down to dust your flag has gone,
And when the victor passes on,
Start over!

When things go wrong, as some things will,
When something's wrong, there's one thing still:
When off the trail or off the track,
When whipped in battle—reattack!
Whatever height you're headed for,
Remember you have one thing more:
Start over!

Look Up

I saw a little muddy stream
That turned to fairest blue,
Because its surface caught the gleam
Of heaven's azure hue.
And so this life, whate'er it be,
Might turn to heaven fair,
If we would lift our eyes and see
The beauty everywhere.

Take Up the Slack

When the work's getting hard, when you're all out of lard,
And potatoes and bacon and flour,
When you're scraping the bin till you nearly fall in,
And your life's at the gloomiest hour;
When you're hungry and sore, and what's worse and what's more,
When unfairly the cards have been dealt,
Still you aren't all through—there's a thing you can do,
And that's take in the slack of your belt.

Take it up just a bit, show your grin, show your grit,
Though the goal of ambition is far;
Take your belt up a notch; show you're Dutch, show you're Scotch,
Or whatever it is that you are.
There were other folks, too, other fellows like you,
Lady luck gave a terrible welt;
But, when all out of wheat and potatoes and meat,
Then they took up the slack in their belt.

There never was yet any man I have met
But his supper had missed now and then;
But he got up at dawn and he carried right on
Till he brought home the bacon again.
I, too, saw the time when I hadn't a dime,
When decidedly hollow I felt;
But it braced me a lot, when no supper I got,
If I took up the slack in my belt.

Brother, take up the slack when the world's looking black,
Brother, tighten, not loosen, your grip;
Give your shoulders a brace, get a grin on your face,
Get the words of a song on your lip.
It will strengthen your spine, it will make you feel fine,
However life's cards have been dealt,
If you never give in when you're scraping the bin,
But just take up the slack in your belt!

There's a Way

There's a way to win success
In the things we want to do;
If you win or not is less
Up to luck than up to you.
Though your yesterday is past,
Though your plan may fail today,
You will master fate at last;
Don't you worry—there's a way.

More men quit than ever lose,
And they lose because they quit;
You can master if you choose—
Pick your work, and stick to it.
You are human, mortals are;
You will err, as people may;
But, the summit near or far,
You will reach it—there's a way.

Wealth is seldom won by chance,
Brief is accidental fame;
Wars are won when men advance,
What the battle, still the same.
Turn discouragement aside.
This defeat? 'Tis but delay!
Some new method must be tried;
Work and find it—there's a way!

Think What You Are

Think what you are! However weary,
  Your task how small, your task how great,
However dark the day or dreary,
  Think what you are—the world must wait
Until the thing you have begun
Is bravely dreamed and rightly done.

Think what you are. However lonely,
  However much yourself you doubt,
Some task is yours, your problem only,
  For you to take and work it out.
Each day the world's new labors start
And in that world you have a part.

Think what you are. You were the nearest
  To take the task that now is yours,
To work the hardest, see the clearest,
  To work so well your work endures.
Your hands today will bless or mar
The world around. Think what you are!

Tomorrow Morning

Let me lie down tonight content
To take my burden up again
Tomorrow morning. Labor-spent,
Let me lie down content, and then
Arise tomorrow morning glad
To take again the task I had.

Let me return to my old task
Tomorrow morning glad to see
Some duty that the day will ask
Tomorrow morning 'waiting me—
Yes, be it counter, bench or chair,
Be glad to find it waiting there.

But how tomorrow morning may
I know the joy of day's return?
Because, I wonder, of my pay,
Because of money that I earn?
Well, men are paid a worthy hire
A lot of times, and yet they tire.

Tomorrow morning most depends
On not tomorrow but tonight.
It is the day that nobly ends
Because today we lived it right
That makes tomorrow morning seem
A dawn as lovely as a dream.

Live well the day, do well the deed,
Whatever deed is yours to do,
For, if you do, you do not need
To worry over mornings new,
Nor fear the sun, if this one sets
Amid no shadows of regrets.

Live well today, and leave no frayed
And tangled ends of things half done,
Things poorly said or poorly made,
To greet tomorrow morning's sun.
If you would see the sun arise,
Then leave no clouds upon your skies.

The Two Captains

One captain went clear through the war
And never struck a blow;
He came home with a perfect score—
A perfect letter O.
Citations never mentioned him,
For, neither good nor bad,
He came home safe in life and limb—
But that was all he had.

'Twas Capt. Go-and-Do, the man
Who served his flag in France;
And well and wisely he could plan
Just how men should advance.
As brave as any soldier true,
No fight he ever won—
He didn't know that Go-and-Do
Gets very little done.

Another captain came back home
With honors that they gave,
Came proudly sailing o'er the foam,
The idol of the brave.
(No braver man than Go-and-Do)
They hailed him Marne to Metz—
The other captain of the two
Was Capt. Come-on-Let's.

The war is over, industry
The soldier now demands;
And yet the fate of nations we
Still carry in our hands.
O captains of the battles new,
When business duty frets
Are you a Capt. Go-and-Do
Or Capt. Come-on-Let's?

Try

I'm sure success will never seek
The idle out, to give them fame;
Whatever discontent they speak,
However loudly they may claim
Injustice sitting where they are,
I'm sure that not a single star
Will fall from heaven anytime
Because they starward would not climb.

I know success not always comes,
Though well we strive and hard we try;
But, rather than to twiddle thumbs
And sit around and whine and cry,
I really think I'd rather choose
To try, although I only lose—
Than lose because I sat and cried
And failed because I never tried.

Wall or Road

Walls, fences, borders, what are they,
That shot and shell may shoot away?
The barriers that hold us back
Are not the forts that men attack,
But barriers we seem to build
Before ourselves. The world is filled
With men who failed. I wonder why?
So oft a purpose seems to die
With not a battlement before.
Peace has defeat as well as war,
And more dreams die by their own hand
Than some attack some foeman planned.

Well, first we build a wall of doubt
About ourselves—ourselves shut out
From cities that we dream to take.
The wall the first of all to break,
Whatever victory we want,
Is that old wall that says, "I can't".
If thus you think, no other man
Is much inclined to think you can.
Who doubts himself has built a wall
Around himself the first of all,
And now must spend his strength and time
His self-made barrier to climb.

And even if he scales the top,
There is another thing to stop
His progress: 'Tis the twisted wire
Of folly, habit and desire.
The brambles that will bar his path
Are often but the fruits of wrath
From seeds that he himself has sown.
I bid you never make your own
And you will find a passage through
The pits that others set for you,
If you yourself no pits have set
Of futile sorrow and regret.

Yes, men will fall, and fall again,
Because they drag a ball and chain
Of foolish pleasure, doubt or fear.
But, if you keep your vision clear,
Your purpose true, your morals clean,
Life has no limit, luck desmesne.
How far a man may go, my friends,
How high he climbs, how low descends,
Depends, whatever fortune brings,
On him, and not on other things—
Not on his luck nor on his load,
But if he builds a wall, or road.

Wanted: A Freckled Boy

Perhaps it's my mistaken mind—
  But where have all the freckles gone?
I very seldom seem to find
  A youngster who has freckles on.
Of course, you sometimes see a nose
With six or seven, I suppose;
  But what I mean is freckles here,
  From chin to brow, and ear to ear.

Now, what is (as is often said)
  Worth doing is worth doing well,
And freckles should be freely spread
  Around the face, I'm here to tell.
If you possess a freckled face,
Then have it freckled ev'ry place,
  So not a soul can doubt a lot
  If it's a freckled face or not.

There never was a freckled lad
  That other people didn't like.
Another thing: he always had
  A name like Jimmy, Bill or Mike.
You never saw an Algernon
With very many freckles on,
  Or someone freckled who was called
  A Percival or Archibald.

But climbing to the highest branch
You always found the freckled kid.
The roughest pony on the ranch
He said he'd ride, and ride he did.
A freckled boy could climb and run
And have a lot of freckled fun,
And catch more sunfish from a dock
Than all the cherubs in the block.

So if you know (perhaps you do),
The sort of youngster that I meant,
I know a bank, a railroad, too,
Both looking for a president.
Of course, if Freckles they employ,
They'll start him in as office boy,
But he'll be president in time—
For freckled kids can always climb.

What Fools

And so it chanced, that as I went
Along the way, a youth I met
Upon the golden quest intent,
The race for fame and fortune—yet
He bound himself with rope and thong,
Self-shackled every sturdy limb,
Yea, made him weak, who would be strong,
And so I stopped and questioned him:

"And what are these with which you bind
Yourself, who should be strong and free
If you the golden goal would find?"
And then the young man answered me:
"Before upon the quest I go
I bind myself with habits so."

And next I came upon a youth
Who looked to heights celestial, who
Would touch the very throne of truth,
Would rise in flight to skies of blue.
He dreamed a dream that he would sing
Great songs of hope, glad songs of mirth—
Yet he who to the stars would wing
Had tied his heart and mind to earth.

"And what are these with which you bind
  Yourself to earth, who dream of skies?—
Earthbound in heart, earthbound in mind,
  So neither mind nor heart can rise?"
And then the young man answered, "These
Are silly, small vulgarities."

Then Shakespeare's voice came down to me
And said, "What fools these mortals be!"

Whistle or Whine

Each day we stand before a bench,
  Or hand upon a wheel;
Each day we hold a pen, a wrench,
  A broom, a bit of steel.
Each day we have some task to do,
Yes, I my task the same as you,
  And you your task the same as mine,
  Yet some men whistle, some men whine.

For some rejoice and some complain,
  And some do neither one,
For some a gloomy mien maintain
  Until their work is done.
I've often wondered as I went
The road, "Are tasks so different?
  Or is the difference mostly, then,
  Not in the tasks but in the men?"

We Must Pay

Life puts a price on everything:
For things you purchase you must pay.
To many a trinket mortals cling,
But was it worth it, anyway?
The angry heart may win debate
And yet the victor men may hate;
I sometimes think that I would choose
To have men love me, though I lose.

There is some pleasure in some vice,
And yet the uneasy conscience frets.
I wonder, was it worth the price,
The thing we pay for with regrets?
I would be glad, but more than this
I would be right, some joy would miss
And in some quiet rapture find
Less laughter, but more peace of mind.

Who pays with sorrow for his joy,
Some gaudy moment he may clutch,
Is giving gold for life's alloy,
And gets too little, pays too much.
What worth is power, that costs us friends?
Night's joy, if with remorse it ends?
Remember, in some other day
For things we purchase we must pay.

Say Not Tomorrow

Say not "tomorrow" you will be
The straight in conduct, strong in will,
Say not tomorrow you will fill
The hours with honest industry;
Say not tomorrow you'll begin
To do your work, and work to win.

Say not tomorrow you will seize
Your banner trailing in the dust
And lift it high, tomorrow thrust
Aside life's littleness and ease,
And, clear of brain and clean of heart
And strong of arm, will do your part.

For, if you need to work, to plan,
And better dream, and better live,
And more to love, and more to give,
Yes, if you need to play the man,
Tomorrow is too far away—
The time to do it is *today*.

Who Will Be Ready?

Some day will come the golden chance,
Some day will come the great advance
When men move forward, when success
And fortune, fame and happiness
Lie all within the eager grasp;
Some day the curtains will unclasp,
The door swing open. Which of men,
I wonder, will be ready then?

Well, not the idle, even though
The idle may imagine so—
Not those who are content to wait
The opening of fortune's gate,
Not those who are content to stand
With empty purse and open hand;
For fame will pass the beggars by,
However much they wonder why.

Nor yet the discontented—they
Will not be ready when the day
Shall come, the day of which men dream;
For they will doubt the very gleam
Above the hills, dispute the star,
And question all the signs there are,
Will groan and grumble till, at last,
Unrecognized the chance has passed.

Who will be ready? He who strives
Until the golden chance arrives.
Who will be ready? He who seeks
Himself to climb the mountain peaks.
In some great hour to such as he
Will come the opportunity—
'Twill only come, that golden day,
To those already on the way.

The Inventor

He heard the first faint hiss of steam,
As mothers hear their infants' cry,
And saw the vapor of a dream
Take shape colossal in the sky.
He did not hear the laughs of scorn,
He did not heed the mocking sneers;
He only knew that here was born
The giant of a thousand years.

For they who saw the first wheel turn
Saw but a dreamer and his toy:
Their doubting souls could not discern
The dreamer's dream, the dreamer's joy.
But he who bent a listening ear,
When first his feeble engine whirled,
Touched hands in rapture with the sphere
And caught the heartbeat of a world.

The Work of the Day

To jump out of bed in the morning,
To tackle the work of the day,
With something to do that is waiting for you
To do in some excellent way—
Well, there may be pleasure in loafing,
And idleness maybe is fine,
But all that I ask is a place and a task
And a chance at a plan that is mine!

I want to get up in the morning,
To wake when the world is awake,
To find me a bench or a pen or a wrench
And something to fix or to make.
It may be a thread on a spindle,
Or only a bit of a song,
But, while the old world through the azure is whirled,
It's something to help it along.

So give me a task in the morning,
A place I am needed today,
Just what I don't care, but this life is too fair
For people to fritter away.
O, Lord, I don't ask you for honors—
Just give me an awl and a shoe,
For I know I would tire of a seat by the fire
If I didn't have something to do!

Worth a Try

There always is an easy way
To do a thing, as people say;
And yet the fruits worth having, though,
Are not discovered hanging low.

The things you treasure more and more
Are those you had to struggle for;
For things, however low or high,
Are worthless if not worth a try.

And so I rather like the test,
The road that isn't easiest.
It nearly always had, my friend,
A thing worth having at the end.

For all through life I always found
The poorest fruit was on the ground.
To get the apple that was prime,
You had to reach or had to climb!

You Have to Cross the Valleys

You will have to cross the valleys if you want to climb
the hills,
The unexciting journey through the unexciting ways;
It is not the trail that wearies, it is not the climb that
kills—
It's the ordinary labor of the ordinary days.

It's the waiting, and the working, and the ordinary task.
It's the long and dusty highway, it's the valley that
you tread,
That will show the world it isn't just the glorious you
ask,
That will show you have the courage for the greater
task ahead.

You will come to vales of sorrow, to the hot and thirsty
plain,
You will come to disappointment, and to weariness
and ills;
But, your eyes upon the summit, pick your burden up
again—
For you have to cross the valleys if you want to climb
the hills!

You Are Your House

Friend Salesmen, in your work, your play,
Your joy by night, your toil by day,
The things you do, the things you say—
In all you say, in all you do,
Remember this will matter, too:
The world will judge your house by you.

You are your house—your house you bear
From town to town and everywhere;
When you are there your house is there.
Yes, you are all men ever see;
And what you are, in what degree,
The world will judge your house to be.

Be square in trade, and fair in play,
A gentleman from day to day,
And clean in speech, and every way.
In all you say, in all you do,
Remember this will matter, too:
The world will judge your house by you.

You Keep Your Word

You keep your word, whatever comes,
And then don't fret about the rest.
We sometimes lose our little sums,
Are disappointed, dispossessed,
Because some fellow failed to do
The thing he promised me or you;
But, if your own you recollect,
You keep your word, and self-respect.

You do your part, though other men
May fail to do the thing agreed.
The thing that really matters then,
The greatest thing you ever need
To balance up the books of life,
To keep you square with child and wife,
And friend and neighbor, and your heart,
Is after all, to do your part.

You keep the faith, and do not grieve
When others fail, and bring you loss.
There is a profit you receive
That counts for more than all the dross—
To know that men will say of you
You do the things you say you'll do.
Of you, at least, let this be heard:
Whatever comes, you keep your word.

You Never Can Tell

You never can tell: Figure ever so well,
Be as careful and wise as you choose,
But, whatever the game, it is always the same,
There is always a chance you will lose.
You may think that you can, you may dream, you may plan,
When it's something to do or to sell,
You may wish that you could, you may say that you should,
But at that—well, you never can tell.

You never can tell: You may prosper, as well,
Gather honor, and fortune, and fame,
May make even more than you're hungering for,
For life is that sort of a game.
One thing, only one, is a certainty, son,
That no one will doubt or deny:
You may win, you may miss, but I'm certain of this—
That you never can tell, till you try!

Your Name

Someone else your name has borne,
  Robert Bruce or William Tell,
Someone else your name has worn,
  Worn it proudly, worn it well.
  Joseph, John or Samuel,
Someone else has robed your name
In the purple of his fame.

Russia's Peter, Sweden's Charles,
  Alexander, heroes, kings,
Men who fought the people's quarrels,
  Men whose song forever sings—
  Ev'ry name some memory brings
Of some poet, priest or sage
Of some other golden age.

George and Fred and Theodore,
  David, Edward, Lincolns, Lees,
Wrote your name forever more
  On the lands and on the seas;
  Someone bore such names as these,
Henry, Arthur; call the roll:
"Here!" replies some royal soul.

Andrew, Herman, Benjamin,
Thomas, Isaac, Walter, James,
Sought some holy cause to win,
Left their lustre on our names.
On the heights their beacon flames,
From the dark their spirits call—
Someone's mantle on us all.

Surely 'tis a sacred trust,
Such a name as ours to bear;
They who wore it now are dust;
They have left it in our care.
Pray your God your name you wear
Undishonored, free of stain,
Till you pass it on again.

Your Own Weeds First

When him and me was weedin' beans
And sweatin' like a Turk,
Before the world had made machines
For doin' all the work,
When folks got down upon their knees
And really weeded, if you please,
I recollect a thing he said
That always has stuck in my head.

I says to him (the hired man
Who helped around the place),
"You ought to see my Uncle Dan—
His garden's a disgrace.
There's dandelion ev'rywhere,
He doesn't ever seem to care
How sorrel gits between the rows
Or if it's corn or mullein grows."

He says to me (this man, I mean),
"The world is full of weeds.
A weedless farm I never seen,
Nor life of perfect deeds.
In fact no man I've ever known
Who hadn't some weeds of his own.
With sins we all of us are cursed—
So, Sonny, pull your own weeds first."

The more I live, the more I look,
The more I see of men,
The more I read the good old Book,
His words come back again.
I'll try to keep my own weeds out,
Not let the dandelions sprout,
Not let the thistles git a start
In my own garden, my own heart.

Let's fight and conquer human sin,
Cure ev'ry fault we know,
A job that's easy to begin,
We haven't far to go.
Let's make the world a better place
With kindness, honesty and grace,
But, when for righteousness we thirst,
Then let us pull our own weeds first.

Your Work Must Mesh

It isn't always what you do,
  However hard you labor,
That makes a winner out of you,
  But how you treat your neighbor.
By that men either rise or fall,
  It's quite important, brother;
We all must work, but, most of all,
  Must work with one another.

For Mr. Grouchy Go-Alone
  May work from five to seven,
May work his fingers to the bone,
  His little soul to heaven,
Yet no employer wants him much—
  Success has never found him,
Because he didn't keep in touch
  With other men around him.

Each gear must mesh with other gears
  To drive the lathe or spindle;
In each machine that truth appears,
  Our brotherhood to kindle.
Your work must mesh with every man,
  With all the men about you—
If you are part of all the plan
  They cannot do without you.

For teamwork is the test of men,
And they survive the weather,
Though business storms may come again,
Who work, and work together.
Quit being just your little self,
The independent jigger,
Come down from off your little shelf—
Be part of something bigger!

The Rebellious Cloud

The cloud that fed the brook declared,
"I've labored now for ages,
But henceforth earth must be prepared
To pay me better wages."
And so the cloud withheld the rain,
The brooklet lost its motion,
The river dried upon the plain,
No longer fed the ocean.

But, when the ocean had gone dry
Because no rivers flourished,
No vapor mounting to the sky
The thirsty heavens nourished;
The ocean had no rain to give,
And, panting with the weather,
The cloud exclaimed, "If we would live,
We all must work together."

The Best That I Can Do

Old Uncle Ed was never through
  Until he honestly could say,
"Well, that's the best that I can do."
  He never put his work away
Until each corner mitered right
And satisfied his closest sight.

A nail was driven to the head,
  A screw was turned the wood to hold,
And, when the winter day was fled,
  The last sheep always in the fold
Before he locked the barnyard gate
And went his way, however late.

And fair and square the game he played,
  Regardless of the final cost;
He kept a bargain he had made
  If much he won or much he lost—
In money matters said it, too:
"Well, that's the best that I can do."

I think that when he reached the end
  He looked along the way he came,
With every man he knew his friend,
  And not a task to give him shame.
He laid him down at last to rest
Content that he had done his best.

My Wealth

When people ask me what my worth,
I'm glad to tell them I am truly
One of the richest folks on earth;
At that, I do not boast unduly;
And neither am I scoffing at
A wealth of gold and things like that;
I'm talking simple common sense,
Of dimes and dollars, pounds and pence.

Whatever thousands I possess,
If one or five or ten or twenty,
The thing that matters most, I guess,
Is this, that what I have is plenty.
It may be less, it may be more,
But this much I am thankful for:
I'm satisfied with what I've got,
While lots of other folks are not.

A man's as wealthy as he thinks;
What matters most is what he wishes.
I'd just as gladly dine at Pink's
As eat off Copley-Plaza dishes.
For some the Drake alone will do,
The Astor or the Bellevue,
But I can eat from off a tray
And never let it spoil my day.

The Man Who Doesn't Like His Job

The man who doesn't like his job has still a job to do—
And that's to get another job he's better suited to;
Because our job should be our joy, whatever we may make—
And that's the only kind of job a fellow ought to take.

No matter what our wages are, the biggest part of pay
Is just the joy of doing what we do from day to day.
There's joy in digging in a ditch if you've the sense to see
The straighter that you dig the ditch the better it will be.

There isn't pay enough to pay, and keep him satisfied,
The man who works at anything without a thrill of pride.
Of every man and every job that always is the test—
For labor isn't labor when we like to do our best.

And so, before you jump your job, one question you should ask,
Make certain which one is to blame—the worker or the task.
Perhaps the job that seems so hard is hard because of you,
Because it's just for money that you do the thing you do.

Yet every job, if high or low, the wages great or small,
In some way helps to make the world a better world for all.
Wherever you may labor—bench or office, mill or soil—
You're serving other thousands than the men why buy your toil.

The more you do the best you do the more you serve the earth;
The more that you remember that, the more you have of mirth.
There's not a worker anywhere who needs to sit and sob—
Don't think so much about yourself but more about your job.

The Second Frame

I've noticed in a bowling game
The second is the poorest frame:
You miss the 1, you blow a spare,
You think it doesn't matter there—
And then some other fellow wins
And beats you out by seven pins.

You think it doesn't matter much,
That second frame. The ball you clutch
And settle down and get the wood
The way a bowler really should.
You say you'll slip a turkey in,
And that's the way you hope to win.

There are a lot of fellows who
Imagine that's the way to do—
That they can loaf their youth away
And win life's game some other day.
But waiting for the tenth is not
The way we ever make a lot.

The way to win is from the start
To play the game with all your heart,
The first, the second, all the rest,
To find the groove and do your best.
For nearly always wealth and fame
Depend upon the second frame.

Did You Think to Say It?

You liked the way the parson preached:
Perhaps he found you only drifting
And down inside your soul he reached,
Your hope restoring, spirit lifting.
Perhaps he, too, has worn a yoke,
Perhaps temptation, too, befell him;
You liked the words the preacher spoke—
But did you think to stop and tell him?

You liked the painter's vivid art,
You liked the poet's cheery riming,
Some instrument has stirred your heart
And set the bells again to chiming;
Some actor, human first of all,
Some singer making life the better,
Perhaps with joy you still recall—
But did you think to write a letter?

So many things so many days
Make man indebted to his neighbor;
So many folks so many ways
Are helping others with their labor.
Some simple service you require:
You ask the bill, receive, and pay it;
The work was just as you desire—
But did you ever think to say it?

The Salesman

In days of Ab, and prehistoric man,
The father of the family set out
Each Monday morning, by the usual plan,
To roam the hills and valleys 'round about,
And gather sustenance for wife and brood—
To snare the bird, no doubt to trap the hare,
And bring them in for clothing and for food,
For meat to eat, habiliments to wear.

So, club in hand, he sallied to the wild
In search of little and of larger game,
To get a bear-skin tunic for his child,
And for his wife a dolman of the same.
And then at night, or after many days,
He came returning with the sinking sun,
To hear the good wife's welcome words of praise,
And shouts of glee from every little one.

Now times have changed, and yet not changed so much:
On Monday morning modern man goes forth,
A grip and not a club within his clutch,
To make some train to south or east or north.
The bear he hunts is in a buyer's den,
His cave an office with a lettered sign—
A bear no less, pursued by traveling men
Who want to get him on the dotted line.

And, after days, perhaps a week or two,
The salesman wanders homeward as of yore,
Is hailed with laughter by the happy crew
That hailed the hunter at his cavern door.
Though centuries have rolled their way between,
The difference, if any, is but slight:
Ten thousand years ago beheld the scene
Enacted at the salesman's door tonight.

Still we go forth to forage for our kids,
To get a sealskin for the wifey still,
To thread the city's piled-up pyramids
Or hunt the tank towns for a little bill.
To that new cave we call a city flat
We come returning, we who have to roam;
The woman does the cave-work and all that—
The man goes out and brings the bacon home.

The Joy of Doing Things

A blood-red sun goes down the west and night comes up
the east;
Across the harbor sounds the clank of heavy chains
released.
Oh, mystic hour, oh, magic hour, a ship puts out to
sea!—
Land opens then its narrow cage and sets the captive
free.

I sometimes think a great ship goes across the running
foam
As goes the swallow to its fields, the eagle to its home.
I hear the beating of its heart, its great, deep-throated
cry—
The songster of the sea has found its wide, its open
sky.

For it is little boon to be a prisoner of rest
While there are azure skies to mount or rolling waves
to breast;
And men who toil and ships that sail and birds that soar
above
Will always find their greatest joy in doing things they
love.

The Faith at Home

I want the folks at home to know,
  Whatever others say about me,
That, what I do or where I go,
  The home folks have no need to doubt me.
I want the folks at home to feel,
Tonight, when down to pray they kneel,
  Though Father may be far away,
  There is no stain upon this day.

I want the folks at home to trust;
  I want it not for my sake only;
For some stay home, for some folks must,
  And children want, and wives are lonely.
I want the folks at home to keep
One joy when they lie down to sleep,
  The peace of knowing that the name
  They bear has not a mark of shame.

I want the folks at home to say,
  Whatever others say about me,
That here or there or far away
  There is no need for them to doubt me.
However separations grieve,
If just the folks at home believe,
  A fellow still can do his best
  And not care much about the rest.

You Think You'll Quit

You think you'll quit. You do not like
The way they speak to people there.
You hope another job to strike
Where ev'ryone is always fair.
Of course the hours are rather short,
The labor, too, is rather light;
And yet you'd like another sort,
A place that's just exactly right.

That other job you had before
Was not so bad, not near as bad
As once it seemed. What made you sore
Was all the business that they had.
They paid you more than others would,
But often made you work at night;
And so you left the place for good,
To look for one exactly right.

You have another move in mind;
Another job you want to get,
A place of quite another kind
From any you have had as yet,
With not so very much to do,
Good pay, short hours, and lots of light,
And where they're always nice to you,
A place that's just exactly right.

And yet, my boy, my girl, my man,
From job to job we often go,
Yet seldom find, and seldom can,
These Paradises here below.
There's very often something wrong,
I guess, with ev'ry job in sight;
Perhaps we'll have to get along
With one that's not exactly right.

Perhaps the house has troubles, too,
The chief has worries, too, no doubt.
Perhaps there's something wrong with you
And me we never thought about.
We're not entirely perfect, no,
Not always cheerful, prompt, polite;
They keep us on the payroll, though,
Although we're not exactly right.

A Perfect Day

I call just this a perfect day:
  To rise refreshed from dreamless sleep
To hear the matin roundelay
  Of birds that by my window keep
Their little homes and are so glad—
  And then to greet the morning sun,
Forgetting all the woe I had,
  To find a new-born day begun.

To breakfast simply, and go forth
  To lift again the daily task,
Attempt again some work of worth—
  What more than this can mortal ask?
Then all the day to toil beside
  Some new-found friend, or old and true,
And life's ambitions to confide
  In someone who is dreaming, too.

And then at last to come to night
  Without a hurt, without a wrong,
And find the stars are kindled bright
  And all the heavens lit with song—
With sweet and well-earned weariness
  Again my homeward way to wend
And know a fireside and caress
  Await me at the journey's end.

I do not ask for idle ease
  Or hectic pleasures, ample wealth;
I ask such simple things as these,
  As work rewarded, love, and health;
Some hope to dream of, faith believe,
  Some friend beside me on the way,
And love to greet me at the eve—
  I call just this a perfect day.

The New Year

If life were one unending year
  Without a new year now and then,
If there were not a moment here
  When all our lives began again,
I do not think a man could bear
A life's accumulated care.

But, God be praised, the New Year comes!—
  And we are done with ancient things.
We'll count our blessings, add our sums,
  And then, whatever sum it brings,
We'll cry aloud with merry heart,
"Well, so we stand, and here we start!"

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